

ALBERTA BIRD ATLAS NEWSLETTER



A Project of the Federation of Alberta Naturalists

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Executive Director: Albert Brulé

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PETRA STUBBS – NEW EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

Well, once again the Alberta Bird Atlas office has undergone a few changes. **Good luck to Seanna McKenzie who has returned to university.** Seanna did a great job of showing me *the ropes* before she left things in my hands... I'll be keeping regular office hours here, until the end of the project. I hope I hear from you!

A few words about myself?

I grew up in Northern Alberta where birds, like mosquitoes, were a part of life!

My *serious* birding began during university when summer jobs sloshing around Beaverhill Lake introduced me to a wide variety of waterfowl, shorebirds and songbirds.

This past summer presented a great opportunity to observe some of the unique prairie species, while working on the Canadian Wildlife Service prairie falcon project.

Now as executive assistant of the Alberta Bird Atlas, I feel I don't have to remind you of the work that still needs to be done! Instead, I'd like to strongly encourage you to keep up the great work! Alberta truly is a vast and challenging province for birders. I hope 1991 provides everyone the opportunity not only to *cover their Atlas Square*, but also to explore new areas and new birds. □

—Petra Stubbs

REMOTE AREAS PROJECT (RAP)

Volunteers are needed for remote area field trips!

With next summer being our last field season, we still need to atlas a number of priority squares in regions 9 and 10, the northern half of the province.

To get these surveys completed we are developing a program which, in return for some adventurous birders, will assist the Alberta Bird Atlas with financial and logistical planning.

If you cannot undertake a field trip, how about becoming a sponsor of a remote area square? (Have an expedition named after your grandmother?)

If you're interested please call Petra (Alberta Bird Atlas office) at 453-9163 in Edmonton.

For further information on the Remote area programs, please see the central insert to this newsletter. □

WATCH YOUR SWAINSON'S HAWK AND OSPREYS: THEY MAY BE BANDED!

Of all the birds that are raised in Saskatchewan, two of the greatest travellers are the osprey and the Swainson's hawk. **Anyone seeing individuals of either species is requested to look carefully for bands on each leg.** Banding of these two species in Saskatchewan took on a

new dimension in 1988, when we began using additional anodized, double-rivet aluminum colour bands, with the potential for learning much more about these two long-distance migrants.

In the Loon Lake area, on 4-5 June 1988, we caught 7 adult ospreys on their nest (6 females and 1 male), placing a regular aluminum band on one leg and a **black** band with a readable number-letter combination on the other leg. Similarly, aluminum and **green** colour bands were placed on 20 nestling ospreys in July.

Within the area of the 72N Kindersley map area (1:250,000 scale) we placed 107 **green** bands on nestling Swainson's hawks, in addition to the regular aluminum band on the other leg. Most of these nests were found by Jean Harris, Dean Francis or Bill Marjerrison.

Frankly, we would feel fortunate to locate four of the 107 as breeding birds in 1989, because nestlings disperse so widely, and because few breed when only one year old. If you can help us to locate just a few breeding birds of each species, with colour bands, this would have the potential to add much more to knowledge than the simple banding program of past years. In addition, we hope the extra colour band, with easily readable letters or numbers on the other leg, will more than double, perhaps quadruple, the recoveries obtained from the Swainson's hawk wintering grounds in Argentina and the osprey wintering

...continued

grounds in Ecuador and Columbia.

Percentage-wise, with a single aluminum band, we've had a 1.3% recovery rate for Swainson's hawk (65 recoveries from over 2000 nestlings banded to date) and a 5% recovery rate for ospreys (10 recoveries from over 200 banded). Almost all were found dead. Mind you, the recoveries have included some dandies: the first confirmed Swainson's hawk record for Alabama in 1946; two in El Salvador in fall migration on 14 and 22 November; one in Panama in October; two in Columbia, ten in Argentina (two arrived on 23 November); one in Uruguay. One of the Argentina recoveries was 11 years, 5 months old, when found dead in Argentina, and held the North American longevity record for one year. Similarly the few osprey recoveries have included Texas, New Mexico, Costa Rica, Columbia (two) and Ecuador.

Research by Josef Schmutz at Hanna, Alberta has added much to our knowledge of the wide dispersal of Swainson's hawks. Two Swainson's hawks, banded as nestlings near Kindersley, were captured at their nest near Hanna, Alberta, as follows:

987-27491. Swainson's hawk.

Banded 14 July 1979 in nest in 11 ft. willow in hayfield SE 18-30-22W3, Jean Harris nest North of Kindersley, 51° 30' North, 109° 00' West. Trapped 4 August 1985 as adult female at nest 9 miles south and 1 mile east of Hanna, Alberta, 51° 12' N, 111° 50' West, by Dr. Josef K. Schmutz. Six years old when retrapped 200 kilometres west.

987-28505. Swainson's hawk.

Banded 24 July 1981 in nest 10 feet in elm, at Yellow Lake, Derek Kreuger nest West of Swift Current, 50° 10' West, 107° 50' W. Trapped 6 August 1986 as adult female at nest 11 miles south, 2 miles east of Hanna, Alberta, 51° 20' North, 111° 50' West by Dr. Josef K. Schmutz. Five years old when retrapped 310 km WNW.

Each time you see an osprey or a Swainson's hawk anywhere in North America, but particularly in Saskatchewan or Alberta, try to determine whether it carries leg bands. If a colour band is present, note which leg

it is on and try to read, with binoculars or telescope, the two numbers or letters on the colour band. Also record which leg the colour band is on. Send the exact date and exact locale of sighting, with full details (even if you cannot get close enough to read the number), to:

C. Stuart Houston,
863 University Drive,
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7N 0J8
(or phone collect 306-244-0742)

Colour bands have two letters or numbers, one above the other, repeated four times around the band, so visible from any angle. For example:

A	2	B
1	2	B

You might also find Swainson's hawks wearing blue or red plastic bands, also with two large letters or numbers, applied near Hanna by Josef Schmutz. Give equal care and attention to reading these numbers, and I'll pass on details to Joe.

If you sight a bird with only one aluminum band, and you have a good telescope, and the bird sits still in good light, you can **attempt** the much more difficult task of reading the aluminum band numbers. These numbers are much smaller, have less contrast, and you have to read all eight or nine of them, around the entire circumference of the band. This means that either you or the bird must shift position to read the complete band number from three or four directions. The most successful aluminum band reader in the world, the late R.F. Oldaker, read hundreds of gull band numbers at the Vancouver city dump (and accumulated notebooks full of incomplete numbers, too!).

Important. These anodised double-rivet aluminum colour bands cost me \$5 each, since they are not supplied free as are the regular aluminum bands. **If you find a colour band return the band to me at once.** If found before the official banding reports are sent in (December), the band can be used again next year and will save me approximately \$5 for each band returned. □

—C. Stuart Houston

PLEA FOR BIRD ATLAS DATA CARDS

Whether your square is complete **or not**, please send in **all** data collected to the end of 1990. This data is needed at the head office in order to determine area's not covered prior to the 1991 season. So please send your cards in right away. □

DO YOU KEEP RECORDS OF BIRDS? THEY MAY BE MORE VALUABLE THAN YOU THINK!

As you know, most birders keep records of what birds they see while out bird watching. These records may be as simple as what species were seen on a given day. But many have records which also include where the bird was seen and even what it was doing.

Any bird data you have which can be tied to a specific date and location in Alberta can be used by the Bird Atlas! You don't have to be in a square issued to you. If you have such data please send it to Petra at the head office for compiling.

Obviously Petra would love to receive your data all transcribed onto Bird Atlas forms. But if this is not possible, please send the data in a form that is readable and provide the date and location of the observations (a map with a dot on it would even suffice). If your data has breeding evidence that's even better.

Any data going back to 1987, the start of the Alberta Bird Atlas, would be greatly welcomed.

If you are not sure whether your data is suitable or not, be it in content or appearance, **give the head office a call (452-9163)**. I'm sure they will help you out. □

—Editor

AN UNUSUAL CASUAL BIRD REPORT

Hugh Campbell sent in a casual bird report for July 12, 1990 from the Race Horse Campground off Highway 22 in Region 1. A few species of interest were observed including young dipper, Swainsons hawk feeding young and a singing Philadelphia vireo. But the really interesting birds were secretary bird, bustards and ostrich seen at his bird feeder. It was also noted that Hugh has a house in Tanzania. □

—Editor

OWL WORKSHOP AND SURVEYS FOR 1991/92

A strong effort will be needed in 1991-92 to complete atlasing the owls of Alberta. If you have not taken part in this nocturnal activity you're really missing a good a good time. Not only that, the Bird Atlas needs your help!

If you are interested in learning more about owl atlasing and would like to help out give Petra a call. If enough interest is shown, Petra will organize a seminar/workshop this winter to prepare everyone for owl atlasing in early spring.

Petra also indicated that tapes of owl calls and identification handbooks are still available. So if you would like a tape or handbook just give Petra a call (453-9163) in Edmonton.



REGIONAL NEWS

There have been a lot of interesting birds observed this year throughout the Region. Unfortunately I (editor) was unable to get in touch with Bob Storms from the Calgary Region, thus information from this zone is not reported below.

1. Lethbridge Region

Bill Sharp (RC) reports that he has only received cards from four or five people so far and wants to encourage anyone with outstanding cards for the Lethbridge Region to send them in as quickly as possible.

Bill reports that a lot more work needs to be done next year in order to complete the project: particularly in the mountainous portions of the Region. If anyone is interested in helping out please give Bill a call.

2. Medicine Hat

Rob Gardner (RC) reports a pretty successful year with four or five people doing a lot of work. So far 30 of 120 blocks are completed while 80 others having some data collected on them.

Lloyd Bennett probably had the most exciting birds in the area with garganey and eastern meadowlark being reported from the Taber Area. Rob also reports that brown thrasher was also reported from the Region and a mockingbird was confirmed nesting.

Both Chel Macdonald in the Manyberries area and Michael O'Shea in the Bindloss area reported a lot of interesting sparrow records. Michael is also very interested in having visitors this next year to help out in the field. I guess if you're interested in heading down south give Rob Gardner a call and he can put you in touch with Michael.

Rob also reported that their annual field trip into the Suffield Military Base was extremely successful. Not only were a lot of neat birds observed, but the opportunity to spend time on the Base in some of, if not, the best short grass prairie in Canada was a real treat. If anyone is interested in taking part in the Suffield surveys in 1991 please give Rob a call well ahead of time since a lot of prearrangement must be done with Suffield Base.

4. Sylvan Lake - Stettler Region

Myrna Pearman and Lloyd Lohr (RC's) had quite a few interesting records and activities to report from this Region. Myrna noted that over 40 people came out on Bird Atlas Day which was held jointly with the Alberta Fish and Wildlife (Red Deer office) in conjunction with their Watchable Wildlife Program. The event was held at Gaetz Lake Sanctuary and attracted both television and newspaper coverage.

Myrna wants to let everyone know that Darrel Smith is now an assistant coordinator at Rocky Mountain House. Thus people out there have a good chance of getting more help and involvement.

Myrna reports a whooping crane setting up shop at Simpson Lake this summer, with sightings being made from May through July. Lloyd also reports a *Whooper* at Donalda on July 8.

A pair of merlin were confirmed nesting south of Erskine with three young. An interesting twist is that these merlins nested in the cavity of a tree.

The most bizarre record comes from Lloyds area with two black swans being seen at Buffalo Lake and the Stettler area. Undoubtedly escaped birds, but quite the sighting anyway. A black-necked stilt on Erskine Lake, an egret near Mackenzie Crossing and one south of Erskine, pine siskins at a feeder in Stettler all summer, and sharp-tailed sparrows were among the rest of the sightings reported.

5. Vermillion - Wainwright Region

Iris Davies (RC) was so excited with the results from Region 9 when I called that she wasn't sure what was the most interesting news. To date she has received 42 atlas cards and 23 or 24 casual observation forms.

The turkey vultures seen on the Saskatchewan side of the border, east of Wainwright in 1989 finally cooperated and moved over to Alberta. This year fledged vultures were seen on the Alberta side.

Two other birds confirmed breed-

ing in the Region are the endangered piping plover and several brown thrashers. The latter are nesting near Vermillion and Wainwright. The bluebird trails in the Region have also provided numerous confirmations of mountain bluebird nests.

Atlassers are really enjoying the project in the Region as they get more and more familiar with the species in their Region.

Iris's report that enough data has been collected in the Region that they are now starting to see definite distribution boundaries in a number of species. Species with more northern or more southern breeding populations such as the ferruginous hawk are easily spotted now from distribution maps.

Iris is convinced that with the present enthusiasm of atlasers in the Region there will be no problem completing the atlas project in 1991 in Region 5.

6. Jasper - Edson Region

Rick Bonar (RC) is waiting for a number of cards to come in from two people working for him and a graduate student who was working in the Region. Rick also noted that a remote area square out of Grande Cache was atlased this year.



Of the bird data, Rick indicates a number of connecticut warblers and barred owls were seen, or heard, on territories this year. A great sighting of the endangered piping plover was made south of Cadamin on August 24. The observer even managed to get the bird on videotape. Rick also reports peregrine falcon sightings in September and the presence of numerous brown creepers.

7. Edmonton Region

Terry did not have anything unusual

to report from this year when I (editor) called in mid-September. He noted that he had not received many atlas cards from his region's atlasers to date. He wanted to encourage everyone to send in their cards as quickly as possible. However Terry did write a very interesting article for this newsletter on atlas results and methods from the Edmonton Region which everyone should take time to read.

8. St. Paul - Cold Lake Region

Richard reports he has only received one card for this season so far, but unfortunately didn't have any other news for the Region.

9. Grande Prairie - Peace River

Although I could not get in touch with Andy Ranistel (RC), Petra did pass on a letter from John Steeves, out of Calgary, who has reported both a cinnamon teal and an American avocet sighting at Lake Winagami on 17 May, 1990. Both very interesting birds this far north!

10. Fort McMurray Region

Deborah Taylor (RC) unfortunately had no news for the Fort McMurray Region since she was away most of the summer. She also hadn't received any cards to date but wants to encourage anyone with data to send it in right away. □

REGIONAL COORDINATORS

1. LETHBRIDGE REGION

Bill Sharp

Biology Department
University of Lethbridge
Lethbridge, Alberta, T1K 3M4
Phone: 329-2321

2. MEDICINE HAT REGION

Rob Gardner

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3. CALGARY REGION

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5. VERMILLION-WAINWRIGHT REGION

Iris Davies

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6. JASPER-EDSON REGION

Rick Bonar

Weldwood of Canada Limited
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8. ST. PAUL-COLD LAKE REGION

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9. GRANDE PRAIRIE-PEACE RIVER

Andy Raniseth

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Phone: 538-4673

10. FORT MCMURRAY REGION

Deborah Taylor

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Phone: 743-1760 or 791-6020

GO FOR REMOTE

SUPPORT THE ALBERTA BIRD ATLAS REMOTE AREAS PROGRAM

One of the goals of the Alberta Bird Atlas Program is to achieve comprehensive provincial atlassing coverage. Since its commencement in 1987 hundreds of volunteers have participated in the project, covering a considerable geographic area. There remain, however, some regions within the province which—because of limited access to remote areas—have yet to be sufficiently surveyed.

To ensure that the project accomplishes its goal, an intensive volunteer recruitment and Remote Areas Program have been incorporated into the planning for the project's final year.

We need volunteers!

***We need your
financial assistance!***

Be a part of our Remote Areas Program:

Indicate your willingness to participate in a remote areas trip next year

and/or

Make a charitable donation to help underwrite the costs of supporting remote areas Atlassers.

Your commitment is critical to the successful completion of the Alberta Bird Atlas Program.

To help us with our planning for the project's final thrust, your prompt response would be appreciated. Please complete the attached form and mail to:

Go for Remote

Alberta Bird Atlas Project
c/o Provincial Museum of Alberta
12845-102 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5N 0M6

Go for Remote today! All participants and donors will be acknowledged in the atlas publication and all donations prior to December 31 will be eligible for a tax credit on your 1990 tax return.

☒ ***Yes, I want to Go for Remote!***

- ☐ I would like to volunteer for Remote Areas duty in 1991. Please contact me as you begin planning Remote Areas trips.
- ☐ I would like to underwrite Remote Areas activities and be acknowledged as a Remote Areas Sponsor in the Atlas.

I would like to help with a gift of:

- ☐ \$75⁰⁰ will provide a week's food for one Atlasser
- ☐ \$40⁰⁰ will cover the cost of a tank of fuel
- ☐ \$25⁰⁰ accommodation for one night
- ☐ \$250⁰⁰ air fare for one Atlasser
- ☐ \$15⁰⁰ will supply maps for a remote areas trip
- ☐ \$60⁰⁰ will rent a canoe for one week
- ☐ \$_____⁰⁰ other
- ☐ Please send me a receipt for income tax purposes.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

PROVINCE _____

POSTAL CODE _____

Please make cheques payable to:

Federation of Alberta Naturalists Bird Atlas.



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ATLASSING IN THE REGION 7 (EDMONTON) ALONG WITH SOME HELPFUL HINTS TO ATLASSERS

When preparing for the 1990 Bird Atlas season, Gerry Lunn and I decided to take a slightly different approach from previous years. This decision was made after reviewing the data we had from the previous three seasons. It was found that almost 50% of the priority squares in the Edmonton Region had either not been atlased at all, or had only casually been atlased (25% complete or less). Based on this information, we decided to encourage our atlasers to take as many squares as possible in the hopes that they would get some atlasing done in most, if not all of the remaining squares. The recommendation was made that at least two trips, two weeks apart, be made to each square to get the higher levels of confirmation. When our regional workshop was done, all the accessible priority squares had been taken, and a number of our atlasers were going to continue working on partially completed squares from last season.

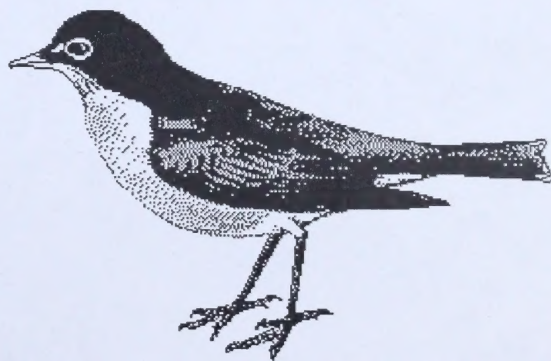
For the final season, we intend to work out the percentage completion of each priority square, and then try as much as possible to atlas the lower percentage squares. This will mean there will be fewer completed squares for our area, but the coverage on a percentage complete basis will be much more even. The formula I used for determining how completely a particular square had been covered, used the percent average of the number of species with some evidence of breeding expected in the square and the number of species confirmed. As an example, a square that should produce 100 species to be complete, has 75 species recorded, of which 30 are confirmed. This is 75% of the total number of species that should be recorded and 60% of the number of species that should be confirmed (50 species). This averages out at 67.5% complete.

Although it is too late for other regions to implement this procedure in its entirety, I would suggest that trying to get some atlasing done in all priority squares, and boosting the coverage on the most poorly covered squares should be the main objective for the last season, even if non-priority squares are more accessible. Another exercise Gerry and I went through in preparing for the 1990 season involved preparation of a series of species maps showing distribution using priority squares only. Three different sized dots designated possible, probable and confirmed breeds. Figure 1 (page 6) shows the results for the American robin and Figure 2 (page 6) shows the results for Forster's tern. The robin, a conspicuous and easily identified species, shows good distribution everywhere we have atlased. The Forster's tern however, which should be found throughout the Edmonton Region, where there is suitable habitat, has only been found in five squares. I suspect that the problem is partly in identification (it is very similar to the common tern) and partly the fact that it is a colonial species and people may be loathe to record it unless they find the colony.

Although we only had time to prepare maps for a small number of species, this exercise did point out some of the problem areas. Many of these were to be expected. Nocturnal species, such as owls and nighthawks are often missed. Secretive species such as bitterns were seldom recorded. Difficult species to identify, such as

Philadelphia vireo and some of the sparrows pose special problems. Here we found probable misidentifications as well as species with poor coverage. Some species, such as many of the warblers, where identification is largely auditory rather than visual, are often overlooked. Late migrants, such as white-crowned sparrows in the Edmonton Region are occasionally recorded as breeders. To assist atlasers with identification of the more difficult and/or less common species, Gerry and I led an evening workshop on the topic, focusing on several key species. This meeting was held during the regular May meeting of the Edmonton Bird Study Group.

I suspect that each Region may have its own peculiar problems. Some of these problems may not come to light unless maps for each species are prepared. It is asking too much to expect each region's Coordinator to prepare maps for all of his species, but this is a job the computer should be able to handle. If we can get species maps for each area, we may be able to solve a lot of problems in the final season. □



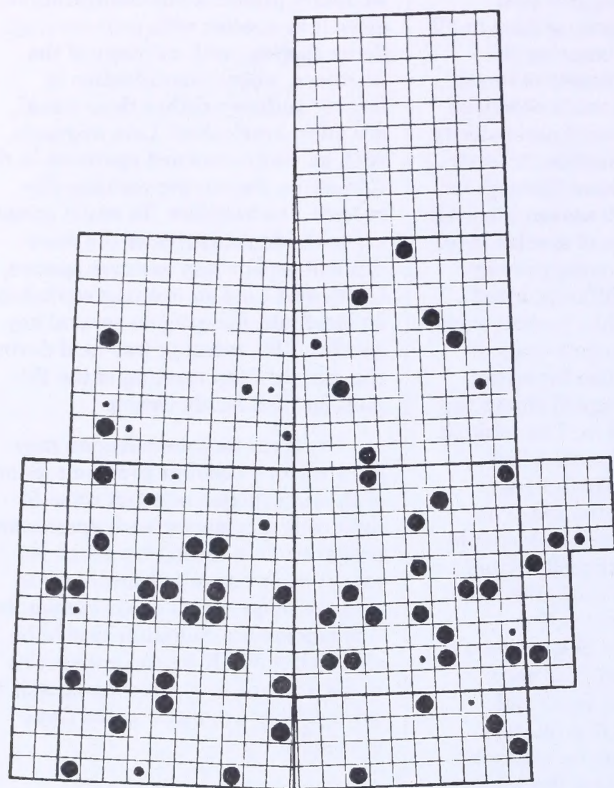


FIGURE 1. AMERICAN ROBIN

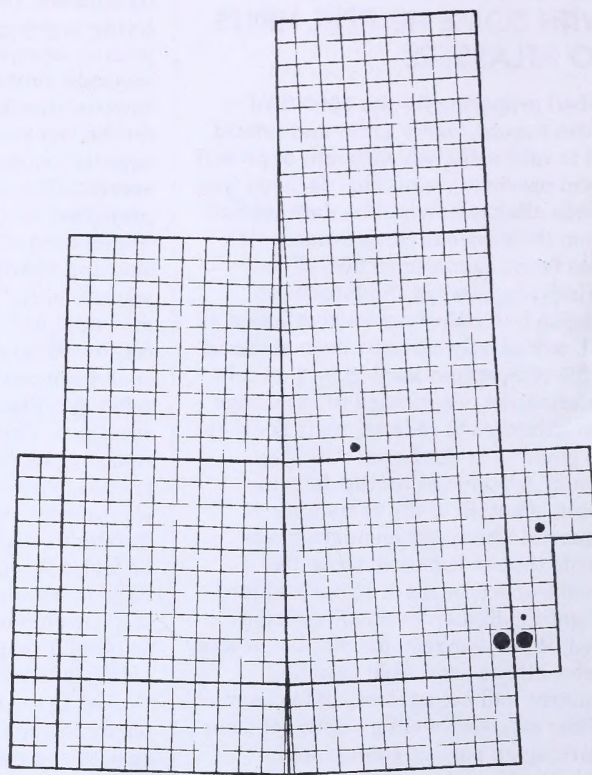


FIGURE 2. FORSTER'S TERN

LEGEND

- POSSIBLE
- PROBABLE
- CONFIRMED

ALBERTA BIRD ATLAS PROJECT, C/O

Alberta
 CULTURE AND MULTICULTURALISM
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